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Allergies

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Allergies

Airlines now hand out to passengers little packets of crackers rather than peanuts, since some people have strong allergic reactions to peanuts. Some of us are allergic to pollens and moulds; others have allergies to milk products; still others cannot partake of any food that contains a form of wheat.

Allergies are not related to universally harmful substances such as poisons, but to naturally occurring and normally beneficial materials which only a limited number of us experience as annoying or perhaps harmful. One person relishes cheeses, and finds them an advantageous part of his or her diet, while others, if they eat even a small amount, break out in a rash. Some of us enjoy a springtime walk in a park while others, after only a few minutes' exposure to the same conditions, become congested. Most of us seek remedies for allergies and would rather not have them.

Some among us appear to have allergic reactions to a wide range of expressions and practices that are related to spirituality. One person talks about his or her personal religious experience rather freely, while another person finds such a conversation upsetting; some delight in reading Scriptures while others find it all "too much;" prayer and reflection bring peace to some of us, while the very words are disturbing for others.

Some spiritual allergies are, like their physical counterparts, seasonal, as when a person who at one time could not even enter a church without feeling uncomfortable, at another period in life finds consolation in a space that is dedicated to practices of spirituality. Our experiences vary: some allergic reactions dissipate over time, while most diminish, if they do, because of positive experiences that occur spontaneously, or follow upon making decisions to find out if the benefits others apparently have from their habitual practices or perspectives could be ours as well.

Spiritual allergies are accompanied by annoying symptoms that are similar to the itching, rashes, and difficulty with breathing that are caused by material substances. Some of us might hear of a warm faith-community that one person praises, while we might feel "left out" or somehow "different." The allergic reaction does not mean either that the other persons are wrong-minded or that there is something amiss with us. Rather, the uncomfortable symptoms can serve as indicators that some aspect within us is in need of healing. Healthy responses could be as varied as acknowledging our desire for community, even if not of the same kind as we heard described, or recognizing the importance to us of the kinds of community we already experience.

One of us could literally find it hard to breathe in the company of those who talk openly about their relationship with God. An allergic reaction to hearing what others say, if we take time to reflect, can reveal a hidden fear that we would lose our own treasured internal experiences if we spoke of them, or we might find that our own experiences are for us too personal to share with anyone but perhaps a very trusted confidant. Either way, we can profit by noticing, rather than ignoring, our immediate reaction, and taking the time to evaluate our experience with honesty: our spiritual remedy.

Allergies of the spirit can be healed with prayer and reflection. No prescriptions or over-the-counter medications are required.